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Dickerson/R1/USEPA/US  
02/23/2009 05:12 PMTo Cynthia Catri/R1/USEPA/US@EPA, David  
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Subject article about Th's meeting

## Heightened security aims to prevent toxic fire at Aerovox

By **BECKY W. EVANS**Standard-Times staff writer  
February 21, 2009 6:00 AM

NEW BEDFORD — The city has boosted security at the PCB-laden Aerovox mill, which federal environmental officials are planning to tear down to eliminate the threat of a toxic chemical fire. In December, the city acquired the 10-acre industrial site from a limited liability corporation due to a nonpayment of taxes, said Environmental Stewardship Director Scott Alfonse. As of Jan. 26, security agents from Day & Zimmermann have been providing around-the-clock surveillance of the 450,000-square-foot abandoned building at 740 Belleville Ave.

City police are working closely with the security company, and the North End station has also increased patrols "in and around that area," Police Chief Ronald Teachman said.

The heightened surveillance is intended to prevent anyone from breaking into the property and setting it on fire, said Alfonse, who noted that there had been two break-ins at the mill last year.

"Air emissions created by a fire and runoff from fire suppression activities into the harbor pose threats to human health and the environment," according to the Environmental Protection Agency.

Periodic use of the site by the EPA and the Army Corps of Engineers has provided some deterrent to would-be trespassers, but with negotiations over the demolition dragging out between the city, the EPA and the responsible party, "it became apparent that we needed security there," Alfonse said. The security is being paid for by funds dedicated to the maintenance of the Aerovox site, he said.

The 24-7 security operation will likely continue until the EPA mobilizes the site for demolition, he added.

EPA project director Dave Dickerson said if all goes well, mobilization will begin later this year with demolition likely to start a year from now.

Alfonse, Teachman and Dickerson spoke at a Thursday night meeting of the Bullard Street Neighborhood Association.

The meeting was held to address residents' concerns regarding public safety in the event of a toxic fire at the building, which is laden with PCBs, asbestos and other contaminants that could release toxic fumes if burned. About 50 residents attended the meeting.

Fire Chief Paul Leger said the department has a pre-fire plan for the Aerovox building, which details how fire trucks would approach the building under different scenarios. The building is equipped with a fire alarm detection system and also has a working sprinkler system that could be activated by firefighters.

Mark Mahoney, director of the city's Emergency Management Department, said the city put together an evacuation plan in July 2007 that details how fire and police officials should respond to a fire at the Aerovox mill. The plan designates three evacuation zones, ranging in size from a 500-foot radius around the mill to a half-mile distance around the mill. New Bedford High School is listed as the mass care shelter.

For all three zones, St. Joseph-St. Therese School at 35 Kearsarge St., is identified as a special needs facility "where special consideration including advanced notification and/or special evacuation transportation may be necessary." Special needs facilities in the half-mile radius zone include Jirah Swift School, Children's Paradise Day Care, Ashley School, Ottiwell School and Whaler's Cove assisted living facility.

EPA spokeswoman Jennethe Falvey said her agency recently met with the principal of St.

Joseph-St. Therese School to discuss the potential fire hazard. Residents at the meeting urged the EPA

and other officials to do more outreach to area schools so they are prepared to evacuate. The sooner, the better, said Norman Nadeau, a neighborhood resident.  
"This city's got a problem with that building. We don't want to wait until the last minute."  
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